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**International Update: Are the Recent Reforms in Polish
Education Making it Harder for Discipline to be Maintained in
Schools?**

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to determine whether the recent educational reforms in Poland are making it more difficult for discipline to be maintained in schools. In general, changes have a negative impact upon school discipline because the likelihood of mixed-ability classes in junior secondary institutions is high.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this article is to discuss if the recent changes in Polish primary and secondary schooling are making it harder for discipline to be maintained in schools.

Motivation for the Article

This article is motivated by the Polish government's recently proposed policy of "zero-tolerance for violence in schools"(http://.poland.pl/news/article,Zero_tolerance_and_curfew_to_end_violence_in_Polish_schools,id,248239.htm). The suggestion came about as a consequence of the suicidal death of a pupil who was molested by her classmates

The theoretical framework for this work is supplied by the general notion of the school as an organization and social institution.

Primary and Secondary Education in Poland

Poles are committed to the notion of compulsory education and public (state) schooling. Poles start school at age 7 and can leave at 18.

There are guarantees in Poland for private schools and special education.

Recent Reforms in Polish Schooling

In September 1999 the Polish Ministry of National Education and Sport introduced significant changes into the primary and the secondary school system of education ((Kucińska, 23 February, 2000; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, 3-72; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, 3-80; Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej, 1999, 3-48). The number of years of primary schooling was reduced from 8 to 6 years, 3 year junior secondary schools (gymnasiums) were created. Starting in September 2001 students (depending on their academic ability) began their studies in either 3 year academic senior secondary schools (specialized lyceums) with the possibility of earning a school leaving certificate (the matura) or 2 year vocational senior secondary institutions (Bogaj et al., 1999, 70).

The Ministry hopes that junior secondary schooling will lead to an increase in the number of pupils entering secondary school due to the fact that these institutions will be better staffed and equipped than many primary schools (Kucińska, 23 February, 2000, Ministry of National Education, 2000, 12-13). Poland's rural dwellers will most likely significantly profit from this particular change. A UNESCO report entitled "Republic of Poland Education For All: The year 2000 assessment" indicates that 35% of the urban adult population have finished secondary school whereas somewhat less than 15% in rural areas have done so. . The establishment of junior secondary schools is in itself a benefit because it segregates pupils between the ages of 13 to 15 from much younger ones¹. That is, of course, if these schools are located apart from primary institutions.

The new system involves: 1) integrated skills teaching for the first three years, 2) block instruction for the next three and 3) teaching by subject throughout junior secondary school. In the old system, instruction by subject began in the second grade. Since it is thought that children have difficulty differentiating between subjects at an early age these changes in teaching practices are an attempt "to make the school fit the child" (Kucińska, 23, February, 2000).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the recent educational changes in Poland make it more difficult for discipline to be maintained in schools because the likelihood of mixed -ability classes² in junior secondary institutions is high. Further research studies need to be conducted on student classroom management in 21st century Polish schools.

Notes

1. This point was made by Mgr Jadwiga Tyszownicka who is a senior lecturer in English at AGH University of Science and Technology in Cracow

2. A mixed ability class:" is a class that consists of learners ... who display a number of differences in their learning abilities, motivation, previous exposure to learning, learning style, personality, attitude, and[a] hundred thousand other features that anyone can think of"(http://www.geocities.com/pan_andrew_mixed_ability.htm).

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See: www.nationalforum.com.

Interviews

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